UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.159/SR.345
12 April 1989

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

AD HOC COMMITTEE ON THE INDIAN OCEAN

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 345th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 10 April 1989, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. PERERA (Sri Lanka)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

1. The CHAIRMAN expressed his deep appreciation, both personally and on behalf of members of the Ad Hoc Committee, to the organizers of the international seminar on the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace, held at Sochi, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, on 30 March 1989.

2. The Committee's attention was drawn to paragraphs 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 12 of General Assembly resolution 43/79.

3. During the current session, the Ad Hoc Committee and its Working Group had been allocated 10 meetings. A new document, A/AC.159/L.86, should, together with document A/AC.159/L.55, provide a solid basis for further discussion. The Committee was required to continue its preparatory work in 1989 in order to enable the convening of the Conference at Colombo in 1990. While it would continue to examine the organizational aspects of its preparatory work, it was gratifying to note that agreement had been reached on a major part of the provisional agenda for the Colombo Conference, and although some important issues were yet to be agreed on, a degree of finality had been reached with regard to the rules of procedure. Attention should now be devoted to questions of participation, stages of the Conference, level of representation, documentation, consideration of appropriate arrangements for any international agreements that might ultimately be reached for the maintenance of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace and preparation of the draft final document of the Conference.

4. In 1985, the Ad Hoc Committee had established an open-ended Working Group to identify, expand and facilitate agreement on substantive issues relating to the establishment of a zone of peace, with a view to, inter alia, recommending to the Ad Hoc Committee elements which might be taken into consideration during the subsequent preparation of a draft final document of the Conference. In 1988, the Chairman of the Working Group had drawn up a list of 20 points in the form of document A/AC.159/L.85, which should help to structure future discussions within the Working Group. It was to be hoped that the Working Group would further elaborate on those issues in 1989 with a view to submitting an appropriate recommendation to the Ad Hoc Committee.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (A/AC.159/L.87)

5. The agenda was adopted.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

6. The CHAIRMAN read out the proposed flexible programme of work, which was open to adjustment if members of the Committee saw fit.

7. Mr. AL-ALFI (Democratic Yemen) said it was essential, in view of the clear mandate to convene the Colombo Conference in 1990, that a decision should be taken on the actual date. He questioned whether so much time should be devoted to the "updating" of document A/AC.159/L.55, it being unlikely that the views of Member States would have substantially changed. He requested that time should be allocated instead to a decision on the date of the Conference.

8. Ms. COURTNEY (Australia), while noting that the programme of work, as just outlined, was quite distinct from the organization of work, which was the subject of an agreement contained in paragraph 6 of document A/43/29, said that there would be little point in discussing the date of the Conference without a prior discussion of the views expressed by Member States.

9. Mr. HAGOSS (Ethiopia) said that he saw merit in the concerns expressed by the representatives of both Democratic Yemen and Australia. He suggested that time should be allotted for a discussion on the date of the Conference at a sufficiently early stage in the consideration of organizational issues, so as to permit consultations among delegations in the event of any disagreement.

10. The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to discuss the date of the Conference at an early stage of its consideration of organizational issues.

11. It was so decided.

IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 43/79

(a) WORK ON THE SUBSTANTIVE AND ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE CONFERENCE ON THE INDIAN OCEAN IN ACCORDANCE WITH PARAGRAPHS 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 AND 12 OF RESOLUTION 43/79

(b) REPORT OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT ITS FORTY-FOURTH SESSION ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RESOLUTION 43/79

12. Ms. COURTNEY (Australia) expressed the hope that the recent lessening of international tensions would lead to establishment of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace. She thanked the organizers of the recent international seminar on the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace, held at Sochi, which had contributed to an understanding of the issues involved. Her delegation reserved the right to address substantive issues at a later stage of the debate.

13. Mr. JAYASINGHE (Sri Lanka) said that the international community's increasing support for peace efforts enhanced the prospects for fulfilment of the mandate of the Ad Hoc Committee. All regional issues, with the exception of apartheid, seemed to be moving towards a satisfactory resolution. At the international level, political leaders, and particularly those of the major Powers, appeared to be taking action to strengthen international peace and security. Such positive developments should bode well for regional peace initiatives, among which the establishment of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace occupied a position of both regional and global importance.

READEX FICHE

(Mr. Jayasinghe, Sri Lanka)

14. The international seminar held at Sochi in March 1989 had made a worthwhile contribution to understanding of the status of the Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace and the process of its implementation. It had also broadened understanding of the importance of establishing a zone of peace, while highlighting the complications encountered at the regional and international levels. Some very valuable suggestions had been made by panellists who were not members of the Ad Hoc Committee. It was to be hoped that more such events would be held in the future.

15. There had been overwhelming agreement at the seminar that the Colombo Conference was vital to the implementation of the Declaration and should not be postponed further. Some participants had viewed the Conference as a major confidence-building measure, while others had called for a closer look at its structure and machinery. In that connection, he drew attention to document A/AC.159/L.74, containing suggestions regarding the structure of the Conference, which his delegation had submitted on behalf of the members of the Committee which were non-aligned States. The Committee should refer to it in its efforts to clarify the scope, objectives and anticipated outcome of the Conference.

16. It had been suggested at the seminar that States which had thus far expressed reservations about the convening of the Conference, particularly the United States of America, should reassess their policies and attitudes. While the Group of Western European and other States had been urged to appeal to the United States, his delegation believed that all members of the Committee should join in making such an appeal, particularly since the United States Administration was in the process of reviewing its approach to various regional issues. Intervention at the highest possible political level would be particularly effective.

17. The Chairman might also, through the good offices of the Secretary-General, canvass States that had expressed reservations about the implementation of the Declaration and the convening of the Colombo Conference. The Chairman might also consider organizing a visit by members of the Committee to countries whose support for implementation of the Declaration was deemed important.

18. In the paper which he had presented at the Sochi seminar, he had noted that little was being done outside the United Nations in connection with the implementation of the Declaration, and had stressed the importance of mobilizing international public support for that process. The holding of periodical seminars and workshops, and greater utilization of the media would be helpful in that regard.

19. It had been emphasized at the Sochi seminar that States both inside and outside the Indian Ocean region should analyse regional and international developments in order to understand their influence on the implementation of the Declaration. It might therefore be useful for the littoral and hinterland States of the Indian Ocean to consider the possibility of holding a second meeting, in view of the significant changes that had taken place at the regional and international levels since their 1979 meeting. However, such a meeting should not constitute a substitute for the Colombo Conference, but rather a prelude to it.

(Mr. Jayasinghe, Sri Lanka)

20. At its current session, the Committee might wish to discuss the demarcation of boundaries of the proposed zone of peace. While the northern and southern boundaries were not problematic, much work remained to be done in identifying the eastern and western boundaries. The Chairman might wish to establish a mechanism that included a consultative process involving States having a legitimate interest in areas directly affected by the proposed demarcation. A careful study of existing treaties, conventions and other agreements might provide guidance in the matter.

21. During the current session, the Working Group would meet to consider 20 substantive issues and principles relating to the establishment of a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean. To facilitate the Working Group's discussions, he had, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group, listed a number of elements under each issue and principle, taking care not to address specific interests, which he hoped would encourage fruitful discussion. He would report on the Group's work to the Committee at the end of the current session. Any progress would be dependent solely on the willingness of Working Group members to engage in a constructive dialogue.

22. Mr. GRUNDMANN (German Democratic Republic) said that the recent seminar at Sochi had pointed up the topicality of the issue of a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean. The seminar had been especially valuable because of the participation by representatives of non-governmental organizations and scientific institutions. As the first of its kind, the seminar had led to a better understanding of Committee members' positions, concerns and hopes. He expressed the hope that the positive atmosphere that had prevailed at the seminar would give fresh impetus to the work of the Committee, and asked whether the documentation from the seminar could be disseminated.

23. He welcomed the continuation of positive trends in international relations in the Indian Ocean region, despite the existence of other, less salubrious developments, particularly the continued presence of a high number of warships in the Indian Ocean. His delegation was nevertheless convinced that co-operation, good-neighbourliness and confidence would continue to replace confrontation, tension and mistrust in the region. The Committee must continue to intensify its efforts, thereby enhancing the reputation and role of the United Nations. Like most States Members of the United Nations, the German Democratic Republic believed that the Colombo Conference must be convened without further delay, and not later than 1990. Fortunately, the positive outcome of the Committee's sessions in 1988 provided a good basis for that.

24. The Committee should concentrate on six tasks which should constitute the core of its work. First, in order to utilize time and resources more efficiently, greater use should be made of plenary meetings for the discussion of substantive issues. For example, they could be used for the consideration of such issues as confidence-building measures, with a view to identifying those measures on which broadest agreement existed and whose implementation would, at the outset, be relatively easy. Second, Committee members could make use of plenary meetings to update the views set out in document A/AC.159/L.86, with more detailed discussions

(Mr. Grundmann, German Democratic Republic)

taking place in the Working Group or in informal consultations. Third, the 20 issues and principles listed in document A/AC.159/L.85 could logically be considered in the Working Group, at which time Committee members would endeavour to spell out in greater detail the main elements of a draft final document to be adopted by the Colombo Conference. Fourth, the current session should be used to achieve general agreement on the scope, political orientation and procedure to be followed with regard to the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the Meeting of the Littoral and Hinterland States of the Indian Ocean. The experience of other United Nations bodies which had held similar observances should be studied. Fifth, the drafting of the Committee's report and its resolution for submission to the General Assembly at its forty-fourth session should begin promptly. Finally, the Committee should consider how the exchange of views begun at Sochi might be continued.

25. It was thus clear that the Committee had a full agenda, and he urged Committee members to display a sense of responsibility and make optimum use of the time available.

26. Mr. YU Mengjia (China) said that his country had always supported the efforts of the countries of the Indian Ocean region to maintain their independence, sovereignty and security, as well as their just and reasonable demands for the establishment of the zone of peace and the convening of the Colombo conference. Unfortunately, the objective of establishing the zone of peace had yet to be fulfilled: the Conference had not been held and preparations for it in the Committee had encountered many difficulties, pricipally because of the expansion of military activities in the region by certain outside Powers. Those countries must stop their military activities, respect the independence, sovereignty and security of the States of the region, and refrain from any threats, interference, subversion or invasion. For their part, the countries of the region should promote peace, friendship and co-operation on the basis of the principles of peaceful coexistence. They should not attempt to accumulate weapons in excess of their defence needs, and should use their weapons only for purposes of defence, not for aggression against other countries.

27. The recent trend towards relaxation of tensions in the world was welcome, particularly the withdrawal by one super-Power from a hinterland State of the Indian Ocean. Solutions were being found in the case of other regional trouble-spots as well. The current favourable situation should therefore be used to advantage, and efforts to bring about the early convening of the Colombo Conference should be stepped up.

28. It could not be denied that differences still existed as to how to implement the Declaration. The correct approach lay in broadening areas of agreement while narrowing areas of conflict. He hoped that the parties concerned would co-operate with the countries of the region to establish the zone of peace.

(Mr. Yu Mengjia, China)

29. His delegation hoped that the Working Group would intensify its efforts to resolve the issues referred to in document A/AC.159/L.85, and would make further progress in efforts to identify and broaden areas of agreement on related substantive issues. China would continue to participate actively in that effort.

OTHER MATTERS

30. Mr. ABBADI (Secretary of the Committee), replying to the representative of the German Democratic Republic, said that, as the Sochi seminar had produced many documents, it would be difficult to disseminate them all. However, if delegations were interested in obtaining copies of specific papers, he would endeavour to provide them. A press release on the seminar issued by the Department of Public Information would be distributed to the Committee.

31. With regard to the commemoration of the 1979 Meeting of the Littoral and Hinterland States of the Indian Ocean, the officers of the Committee had discussed the matter and had sought advice from the Secretariat's legal experts. It had been ascertained that no standard procedure for such observances existed. Consequently, the Committee, which was master of its own procedure, might wish to find an appropriate way of commemorating the event. The mandate for such an undertaking already existed in General Assembly resolution 43/79, and no financial implications were involved.

32. The CHAIRMAN invited the members of the Committee to make suggestions regarding the commemoration.

33. Mr. JAYASINGHE (Sri Lanka) welcomed the information provided by the Secretary, and said it might be useful to ascertain what procedures had been followed by other bodies holding commemorative meetings.

34. The CHAIRMAN said he had been informed by the Secretary that the Special Committee against Apartheid had recently held such a meeting and that the procedure followed in that case would be looked into.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.